

Antiquity

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Editorial Notes

A READER of ANTIQUITY suggested recently that we should start a 'comic section'; and a reference to this in our last number has prompted an American reader to send a friendly protest. We are not seriously thinking of having a comic section, but it is certainly not for lack of material, and in proof of this we propose to devote these pages to a few instances which have all occurred since our last number was published. We do so in the hope of giving our readers and the general public some idea of difficulties encountered by the professional archaeologist and others concerned with the advancement and diffusion of real knowledge. These difficulties are not minimized by the laws of libel which operate in favour of the crank, the charlatan and the common swindler.



The best story of the season unquestionably comes from The Wash, where King John lost his luggage; but it is a story that is still but half told, and the really funny part comes at the end. We shall not therefore spoil it by premature publicity, especially as some of our readers may already have read an excellent and well-informed summary in *John Bull* (vol. LV, 13 Jan., 1934, 8-9). When the time comes we promise to give as sober and restrained an account as possible.

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From the sands of The Wash to the sands of the Libyan desert and 'the unexplored Upper Nile and Abyssinia'. Here or hereabouts 'one of the largest scientific expeditions of recent years led by Count Byron de Prorok' hopes to find 'the body of Alexander the Great and King Solomon's mines'. Later on such minor items as the 'Royal Tombs in the Mountain of the Dead', the 'lost oasis of Zerzera' (*sic*), the 'famous emerald mines of Cleopatra' will be roped in. 'Lost African civilization will also be sought, linking up the theory that the North Africans and the Mayans in America both originated from the lost continent of Atlantis'. But it is always as well to have a second string to even the best-linked theory, and further on we are told that 'Prorok expects to find another Atlantean migration in this research' in Abyssinia.



The account from which we quote, published in *The Egyptian Gazette* ('about 14 December 1933'), concludes by stating that 'the expedition is being undertaken under the auspices of the International Anthropological Institutes of the British, French, Italian, Egyptian and Ethiopian Governments'; and that 'in addition to Count Byron de Prorok, F.R.G.S., the party includes' certain persons named. The expression 'International Anthropological Institutes' has no meaning; but if it is meant to include (as obviously it is) the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, we are informed that the statement is incorrect. We also understand that Count Byron de Prorok is not a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.



Armenia supplies the next instalment. In the *Sphere*, 16 December 1933, were published four illustrations 'taken by Mr Carveth Wells, the American traveller'. We are further informed that 'illustrations of this type have been banned since the advent of Stalin (!), and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Mr Wells was able to obtain them'. The Editor of the *Sphere* evidently does not read ANTIQUITY as carefully as he should. If he did he would have known that one of his pictures—or rather another picture of the same objects, a rather better one!—had already been published in ANTIQUITY (1932, VI, 463–6, PLATE II). This and the others were taken by the Editor on 19 June 1932, without the need of asking special permission and without experiencing the

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slightest difficulty. Further, the objects shown in these two pictures are *not* 'Hittite carvings found by Mr Carveth Wells during his visit to Armenia', and shown by a cuneiform inscription to 'belong to a period between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, B.C.'. Nothing of the kind; they are the carved capitals of an early Christian church, whose ruins are seen in the background; and they were not found by Mr Wells but by archaeologists of the Armenian Government by whom the site was excavated and subsequently scheduled as an ancient monument.



Another illustration on the same page is of the 'fourth century pulpit' in the cathedral of Mtzhet—which is not in Armenia but in Georgia, of which country it is the old capital. In this cathedral the Editor of *ANTIQUITY* also took a photograph—of a fresco on the wall; though unfortunately it was a failure. The custodian, a priest, raised no objection whatever to this proceeding, when, as courtesy demanded, his permission was asked.



Next we are shown a photograph—said to be the first taken—of 'an Armenian monk holding the spear-head with which one of Pilate's soldiers is believed to have pierced the side of Christ at the Crucifixion. Its authenticity has never been definitely established'. This so-called spear-head is an obvious fake—which helps to explain the previous reluctance of its guardians to have it photographed.



Finally we are introduced to 'members of the Kheysur tribe' who 'are believed to be descendants of the Crusaders (and) to speak the English language of the time of Richard Coeur de Lion'. What rubbish! Of the existence of these people, armed with shields and swords and chain mail, there can be no question (though they belong to the Caucasus, not to Armenia). But the rest of the statement is quite inaccurate and misleading. As if any language would remain unchanged for over 700 years, apart from the fact that the alleged Crusader connexion is baseless and in the highest degree improbable.

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We close this merry hour listening in to Mr B. ' discussing an archaeological matter with my good friend Mr A.', in the columns of the *Hertford Mercury*. What is it about? Why, the deluded Mr A. derives Ermine Street from 'the word "ermen" (which) would denote "side" or "arm" road in Egyptian'. Both Mr A. and Mr B. agree to ' recognize an Egyptian colonization of Britain ' ; but in this instance Mr B. prefers to find his derivatives nearer home, in an Anglo-Saxon word ' herman ',* meaning, so far as we understand Mr B. (which is not far), ' military road '.

Even comedy has its comic relief ; and with this last episode we take a fond farewell of all our saneness. Good-night, everybody, good-night !

The SUBSCRIPTION to ANTIQUITY for 1934 is now DUE. We would remind our Subscribers of the form and envelope inserted in the December number for the purpose of remitting payments. *An early response will be much appreciated as this will save avoidable trouble in having to send out direct reminders.*

Payment should be made to

ANTIQUITY, 24 *Parkend Road, Gloucester.*

* Actually the word hereman (not herman) does occur once in the whole of Anglo-Saxon literature, meaning not a ' military road ' but a soldier ; and the real origin of the name Ermine Street is clearly and authoritatively stated by the Editors of the English Place-Name Society (' What is now the name of the whole road from London to Lincoln was originally given to that stretch of it which ran through the land settled by the *Earningas, i.e.,* by *Earn* and his people '. *Beds. & Hunts.,* 1926, p. 3).